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FORMOSA

JULY 17, 1950

Mr. Secretary

I am writing this to express my concern that the position of this Department with respect to the defense of Formosa should be fully clear to the President and the Defense Establishment at this time.

We have an intelligence analysis of July 14 (DIC 138) which gives a disturbing picture of Chinese capabilities, of the inadequate state of our own reconnaissance and of the continued insistence of Chiang Kai-shek's armed forces with a view to his own political interests rather than the best interests of the defense of the island.

A Communist conquest of Formosa, either by political or military means or both, coming in the wake of the President's statement, would be gravely damaging to our political position not only in Asia but possibly throughout the world. I believe that it would be comparable in its effects to a complete military defeat in Korea.

Should there be political defection to the Communists on the island, in the absence of any armed invasion, on such a scale to lead to eventual Communist control, there would be little that we could do about it; and there is little that we can do to prevent it other than to expedite in every way the turn of military fortunes in Korea to our favor.

But with respect to the military invasion of the island, we do have capability of influencing the course of events directly. Here it seems to me that the important thing for us all to bear in mind, including the Defense Establishment, is that we can rely on no one but ourselves. The Nationalist forces on the island must, in view of their national temperament, their past experiences and their unfortunate leadership, be regarded as wholly unreliable. This is not to say that they will not fight; it is only to say that they cannot be depended upon to fight. We should therefore go on the theory that no sizable Communist forces must be permitted to reach the island in any circumstances, and that it is solely our task to prevent

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this. The United Nations cannot give us any appreciable assistance in this respect. Our own national prestige is at stake in the most obvious way and no one is going to help us initially with its defense in this area.

I understand that there has been some ambiguity about the reconnaissance function, and a belief in some quarters of the Military Establishment that we in the State Department had barred effective reconnaissance. I urge that steps be taken immediately to clarify this subject and to see that the understanding reached has the President's approval and is plainly and fully recorded.

In summary, the three things which I think this Department must do are the following:

(1) Make sure that the gravity of a possible reverse in Formosa, from the political standpoint, is clearly and adequately stated to the President and the Defense Establishment;

(2) Similarly, make sure that it is understood that we have only ourselves to rely on in the approach to this problem; and

(3) Make sure that there is no misunderstanding about the problem of reconnaissance or about any other aspect of the military defense of Formosa, which could lead to charges that the State Department had inhibited operations essential to that defense.

George F. Kennan

Copies to:

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